DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 693 UD 021 685

AUTHOR Comer, James
TITLE The New Haven School Intervention Project.
SPONS AGENCY Horace Mann Learning Center (ED), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 5 Jun 80
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Strategies for Urban School Improvement Workshop Series (Washington, DC, June 5, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Child Development; Curriculum Development; Educational Environment; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Interpersonal Competence; *Low Achievement; *Mental Health Programs; *Parent School Relationship; *Resource Staff
IDENTIFIERS *New Haven Public Schools CT

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews a New Haven, Connecticut school intervention project as a model for replication in other schools. The functions of a school advisory committee, parent participation, a mental health team, and a social skills curriculum are described as the principal components of the project. The need for preservice as well as inservice training for staff development is discussed with emphasis on the role of a primary resource person who, as a social science educator, would act as a change agent in the schools. It is suggested that there be three elements of training: (1) a research project in which teachers and administrators receive instruction in research methodology and its application and utilization in school problem solving; (2) staff seminars on child development, applied mental health practices, and curriculum development; and (3) a staff practicum for principals. (JCD)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED212693

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
GRACE G. WATSON
Horace Mann Learning Center [ED]
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

# "THE NEW HAVEN SCHOOL INTERVENTION PROJECT"

Presented by

Dr. James Comer
Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry
Director, Schools Program, Yale Child Study Center
Associate Dean, Yale University Medical School

June 5, 1980

STRATEGIES FOR URBAN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
WORKSHOP SERIES

Sponsored by

The Education Forum Branch
Horace Mann Learning Center

in cooperation with

The Office of School Improvement

U.S. Department of Education

UD021685

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | Page |
|---|---|
| JAMES P. COMER | i |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT | 1 |
| PROJECT PHILOSOPHY | 2 |
| PROJECT STRATEGY | 4 |
| PROJECT TECHNIQUES | 4 |
| 1. SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEE | 4 |
| 2. PARENT PARTICIPATION | 5 |
| 3. MENTAL HEALTH TEAM | 7 |
| 4. SOCIAL SKILLS CURRICULUM | 11 |
| EVALUATION | 13 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | 14 |
| 1. PRESERVICE TRAINING | 14 |
| 2. INSERVICE TRAINING | 15 |
| REPLICATION AND DISSEMINATION | 15 |
| CONCLUSION | 16 |

## JAMES P. COMER

Dr. Comer is the Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale Child Study Center. He is also Director of the Schools Program of the Child Study Center, and Associate Dean, Yale University Medical School.

Formerly the Director of Pupil Services, Baldwin King School Project, forerunner of the New Haven School Intervention Project, Dr. Comer has served on the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children and the National Commission on Causes and Prevention of Violence, NIMH, and been a member of the National Advisory Mental Health Council of HEW. He is the author of School Power (1980), Beyond Black and White (1972), and is co-author with Alvin Poussaint of Black Child Care (1975).

## INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure for me to be here as one who enjoys working in the field, and left the federal government to go to work in the field because I felt that's where I could make a contribution. At the same time, I've always felt that it was terribly important to talk to the policymakers, people like yourselves who are planning and thinking about how to make things work in the field. So, this is a great opportunity for me.

My task this morning is to describe our intervention activities in New Haven, and the approach I would like to take is to talk about where we've been, where we are, and where we're going. I would like to give a thumbnail sketch of where we've been and where we are, and then go into some detail about how we got there and where we are going.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Our project started in New Haven in 1968 in two elementary schools, one a K-4 and one a K-6, with 350 students respectively, 99 percent black. More than 50 percent of the children were from families with Aid for Dependent Children. The schools were among the lowest in the poverty indices used by the city. In 1969, in both schools, the children were 19 and 18 months behind in reading and math respectively on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests by fourth grade. There was poor student and staff attendance, a great deal of vandalism, apathy, anger. The behavior of the students, parents, and staff was troublesome, and there was a great deal of acting-out behavior and negative relationships.

The project was funded jointly by Ford Foundation and the Title I monies that the school system received. At the end of five years or the first part of the project we left one school to avoid a conflict with a principal. (It had to do with different philosophies about working with children.) But we stayed in the other school. Both were at the same level of development, socially and academically, at the point that we left the one.

In 1979, in the school we remained in, the students were at grade level in language arts. They were less than two months behind in reading and math. And, they were among the top four schools in attendance in the city, and have been for the past five years. They have been from first to fourth. The teachers have had the best attendance record in the last three years. There have been no serious behavior problems in over five years. We haven't had a student on medication for behavior in at least eight years, that I know of. We have very positive parent and staff relationships and positive community relationships. We think that represents a dramatic change, both in the climate and achievement of that school.

We are also now working in another elementary school and in a middle school. We work regularly with the central administration. We are beginning to try to disseminate the ideas and the principles of our programs into the entire school system.

PROJECT PHILOSOPHY

Our initial understanding and assumptions about the schools and the problems in inner city schools, were that children and families are interested in schooling and they are basically able; also, that basically the staff is caring. I haven't met a school teacher yet that said in the beginning , "I'm going to go into the school and destroy Johnny, and destroy Mary." And yet many school teachers end up doing just that because of the dynamics of schools. So our assumption was that everybody was okay.

My gut level feeling that came from my own experience of growing up in a low-income family was that one of the problems is that the school is a foreign body in the midst of many low-income neighborhoods, and that the basic problem is an interactional problem. Many of my friends, in my opinion, were as bright and as able, did very well on the playground, and very well in church at the Baptist Young People's Training Union, could read the Bible verse and find it as fast as I could. Yet they would sit in school and not respond, not participate, and were considered dumb, or were considered bad. They would act up, and they were considered troublesome. Norman Smith, sitting in the front row, can verify my statement as we are from the same school system.

My feeling was that my family, and many families, supported the black, low-income youngsters in what was essentially a middle-income institution with middle-income ideas, aspirations and expectations. When you had that family support you could make it. When you didn't have that family support, you were in trouble. A disproportionate number of black, low-income children did not have that support, and therefore did not do well in school.

There are at least two reasons for this problem. One is the historical alienation between black low-income communities and the middle or mainstream community, the kind of distrust that has developed, and the kind of social skill effect, or lack of the social skills needed to make it in mainstream institutions that occurs when you are marginal in the social system. And many low income, minority families are marginal in the social system, a disproportionate number. The decreased sense of community that exists today because of the isolation of large numbers of low-income people in separate communities, and the decreased communication that has been caused by high mobility and transportation, so that teachers and others have lived far away from school, there is not a sense of community, and they are not people who can automatically be trusted -- all of that has served to intensify the distrust and interactional problems between home and school.

The problem dynamic goes something like this: that because of past and present conditions, a disproportionate number of black low-income -- but also all marginal groups -- children, come to school under-developed intellectually, socially, psychologically, or, adequately developed, but with skills that are useful and acceptable outside the school -- on the playground, in church, in other places -- yet not very useful in school.

What is needed on the part of the school is a developmental response, a sense that these children are able, but lack certain skills, and these skills can and must be developed in these children. They should be helped to acquire the skills needed for school success.

But school staffs, by and large across the country, have little or no child development/human relations/mental health knowledge or skill. The kinds of courses that most teachers receive, and most people working in schools receive really do not prepare them to apply child development, human relations and mental health knowledge and skills in the classrooms. It really doesn't help to know that there is an id, a super ego, and an ego, and that there is somebody named Freud, which is about what the introductory psychology course teaches you. It is the application of essential behavioral social-science principles on the firing line that makes the difference.

Many of our schools and people have a Puritan and Calvinist heritage. We all have it. And our response to the problems we see in school is to think of children as either good or bad, smart or dumb. We reward the good, and we punish the bad; we label the dumb as dumb and smart as smart, and we try to remediate the dumb.

Healthy children don't respond well to labels. They react to labels. They react to put-downs. They react to being neglected. And they fight back in one way or another. And even if they don't fight back, they take a defensive response which is one of avoidance and/or withdrawal and essentially apathy. They may fight back by withdrawing and acting out, trying to undermine the school teacher, and take over the classroom.

This kind of response makes the staff frustrated because they are not able to perform as well as they would like as professionals. They become angry. They rationalize and displace their anger and inability to function on the youngsters, the community, the parents, and their racial group, and so on. There is a decreased expectation for good performance in those schools, and essentially the school is not a place where children will learn well or easily. Parents become angry and/or avoid the school and/or are in conflict with the school in one way or another as a result of the conditions they observe in the school. And an atmosphere of despair, hopelessness, and conflict then begins to develop in the school. From that point on, everybody else who comes into the school is socialized into that spirit of despair and hopelessness about these children.

## PROJECT STRATEGY

Now, our hypothesis or strategy, based upon our knowledge of minority communities, low-income communities, systems, human development, and so on, was that if you could improve the climate of relationship between home and school, and in school between the parents, teachers, administrators and everybody involved, that the children would learn at an acceptable level. Our strategy was to apply the principles of the behavioral and social sciences to every aspect of the school program, and not just "fix the sick kids," because our understanding was that the vast majority of the children labeled sick or troublesome were not sick or troublesome at all. They were simply reacting to difficult conditions in the schools, or to school climate that was not structured to their developmental needs.

I would like to underscore this point, because the major problem, in my opinion, is the relationship problem. Much of what we do in school has very little to do with relationship. We had an observer come into our school and stay there a week to try to figure out what we were doing. He finally said, "You know, it's clear that you're doing the same thing everybody else is doing. It is just that you are doing it differently." That is true. There is nothing radical about our program at all. Everything that is being done in our program has been done in other schools somewhere. The difference is that what we are doing, and the way we are doing it is based on our understanding of the way children develop and function, the way adults function, and some knowledge of how systems function. And pulling all of that knowledge together and applying it to every aspect of the school is what we do.

## PROJECT TECHNIQUES

### 1. SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Let me talk more specifically about our method. One of the major things we realized we had to do was to develop a governing and managing system that was representative of all of the people in the school, but advisory to the principal. The reason it is advisory is so that the principal would not be paralyzed, and the principal had final responsibility. The reason that it is representative is based on our understanding of the conflict between home and school.

In the past, in the 1900s and right up until the 1940s and 1950s, we were a nation of small towns and rural areas, and there was a natural sense of community. You could bump into your teacher in the A & P store -- I used to walk with my second grade teacher to class hand in hand -- and there was this sense of community. You knew those people, your parents knew those people, and there was trust. You could only act up so much given that kind of situation. Now, when your teacher drives a half an hour to school, you don't know those people, and there is a reason for distrust and animosity between racial groups and income groups, and other differences, then you have to re-establish a basis of trust.

By bringing people together into a governing/managing group that was made up of parents, teachers, administrators, aides, and everybody in that program, -- and if we had been in a high school it would have included students -- by having that group share in identifying the problems in the school, of planning to address those problems, identifying resources, and mobilizing those resources to address problems, implementing the program that was developed, evaluating that program, and then modifying that program, and having all those people responsible for doing that, and involved in doing that, you restored that sense of trust, the sense of community that existed naturally before. You reduced some of the antagonisms between groups that make school life troublesome.

Our program was chaotic in the beginning. I don't want to sound like it's perfect now. A point I want to make is that schools are never perfect. Just like any other institution, it's an on-going battle to deal with the issues and problems that come up in a school. It was extremely chaotic in the beginning with children rushing all over the place, great anxiety, acting up. We had a parent who said, during that difficult period, "If I could just come into that school and believe that it was a school, I would be satisfied." So, it was a very troublesome time.

But that interaction between parents who were unhappy with what was going on in the school and our staff that was trying to make a difference -- both the school staff and the mental health staff -- led to a strengthening of that coalition of people planning to make it different, and then made it possible for us to move ahead as a group, and to develop a consensus. I want to underscore the word consensus, because I think consensus about where the school needs to go and what you're trying to accomplish is what is most important to make schools work.

## 2. PARENT PARTICIPATION

One of the key elements that we felt important to make schools work in inner city communities was to have parent participation. This would serve to decrease that sense of alienation and distrust that existed. So, we started out by, after that first difficult year, pulling the parents together with staff in a summer session that was designed to look at curriculum. But, in fact, we were really trying to decrease the alienation, distrust, and social distance, and eliminate the stereotype that parents had about school, and that the school staff had about parents. That summer session enabled us to get off to a good start in bringing about a change in the school, and developing a parent participation program that was effective.

We eventually developed a three-level participation program. At the first level there is a core group of parents. In the King School it's now called the parent power team. This team of people is strengthened by having about 10 to 15 of those parents working in the classroom, and these are parents of children in the school who graduate when their children graduate. So there is always the presence of concerned people, but a turnover of those people so that you never get a group of people for whom it just becomes a job again. You always have a group of very dedicated people because it's their children. This group of people is the core of the parent power team.

There are about 30 to 40 parents, then, in the parent power team tnat are always planning projects in the school in support of the school program and with the school staff.

The presence of parents in the school sends a message to the children, and the message is basically, "We care about this school." Another message is, "We are respected in this school." Another message is, "We respect the people in this school." And another message is, "We want you to learn." The youngsters' parents come by when they make a good grade in class, and some of the children from the most difficult families who can't come will go to someone from their neighborhood and show them the paper, and they will be rewarded by that person. The presence of the parents is to send the message, because the message that occurs in schools that are difficult, where there is distrust and alienation, very often for example, is that if a child comes home and says, "Mrs. Jones yells at me," a parent who feels alienated, distrustful of the school, might say, "Well, Mrs. Jones yelled at you because she doesn't like us." "Us" means low-income people, black people, people on the other side of the track, or whatever. It is also a message that you can go back and get Mrs. Jones if you want to. Now, if you're involved in the school, or you know people who are involved in the school, and you know that school is really operating in the best interests of your children, then you're more likely to say, "Well, Mrs. Jones was upset with you because you didn't get your work done, or you weren't cooperating, or you were talking out of turn. She just wants you to perform well." It's a very different message. That means go back and do your best. By having parents in the school in that way, we were sending very specific messages to the children.

At the second level, and from this first level of a core of parents, they elected people to serve on what eventually came to be called the School Advisory Committee. This is the policy making body in the school that made decisions for the school. They were elected to this body, and served with the principal and teachers in the school to make policies and programs for the school.

Third, there was the general participation level so that those parents who were disabled, who for one reason or another, were not able to participate in the school program, working or whatever, could come to the activities of the program. They came because parents would meet them in church, in a choir rehearsal, in the store, and say, "We're having that program tonight and I want you to be there." And those parents wanted that because they were helping plan that program. It was their program. They had a sense of ownership about that program. As a result of that, for our annual Christmas program and other programs, we went from having 25 parents turnout to having 400 parents turnout in a school that only had 350 children. That means relatives, cousins, nephews, grandmothers, and everybody was there. They were there because it was their school, and they had a sense that it was their school. They had potluck suppers, fashion shows, and choirs from the church putting on programs in the school.

What we were doing was systematically bringing the healthy elements of the community into the school based on the notion that many schools are a foreign element in many communities. If you can bring the school closer to the community, and the community closer to the school, you decrease that sense of alienation, distrust, and confusion that many low-income children have in school.

Many of the teachers and the mental health people work with parents to pass on information about how schools work, what they could do with their children, how they could be helpful to their children, how they could respond to various problems that the children had, and so on. Most of this grew out of parents' requests as they began to see the various things that they could do with their children.

I want to point out the value of the on-going evaluation of school programs, because the three levels of participation on the part of parents really grew out of a criticism of our program by an outside evaluation team who felt that not enough parents were involved in the program. We began to look at it, and what we began to realize was that we had parents participating at three different levels, and that this is the normal way that people participate in groups. You always have a core group of people that do all the work. You have an even smaller group of people who make all the decisions -- or at least most of us think so -- and you have others who participate in general. Once we understood that, we began to elaborate this process, and facilitate this process, and made the parent participation programs even more effective.

3. MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

The next important element in our program was our own mental health team. And the makeup of that team was myself, as the psychiatrist, (although as soon as the program stabilized I got as far away as I could possibly get because we were trying to develop a model that was replicable around the country) a social worker (and the social worker became the key operator at the local level), a psychologist evaluator, and a helping teacher. These made up the four core professionals involved in our team. We tried to influence the development of the school programs by participating on the school advisory committee, one of our members being on that committee working with the principal, parents and staff, shaping programs.

In that way we could help them think about how you make a program child-centered. If you make a program for first graders more than an hour, or even 45 minutes, you are going to have restlessness. If you have a program for adults for more than an hour and a half, they are going to lose interest, and on and on.

Passing information and knowledge about what human beings are like and putting that into the planning and development of this program -- that was the role of the mental health team. We worked with principals who have been trained to be in charge, to be administrators, and sometimes to run a tight

ship. I believe in a tight ship, but at the same time in some flexibility that permits people to grow, and some sharing that permits people to grow. We were trying to point out the benefits of sharing power in a school, and letting everybody have a sense of ownership of that school. We have worked with principals on an on-going basis to discuss these benefits.

Then we worked with the parents in the parent power team, and helped them plan and implement. Often parents are criticized for being disruptive in schools, losing interest once they get over a crisis, and so on. But we discovered that one of the major problems -- and the parents themselves told us -- was that they really didn't have the training, experience, and knowledge about how schools functioned. So one of the things that we did was to work with the parent power team, help them plan their meetings, learn how long to make those meetings, how to handle those meetings, how to keep the minutes, how to keep the treasurer's report, etc. So, the parents developed skills. In the beginning it was troublesome. It took two hours to determine whether to use paper plates or china at the first spring fling; but they put on the last spring fling, and all of the planning took one hour. It was a matter of developing skills. These are able people who simply have not had the opportunity to develop certain kinds of skills. Facilitating that, and not concentrating on their weaknesses was our approach.

We worked directly with teachers, and we worked indirectly with teachers, and directly with students and indirectly with students. We developed what we call a pupil personnel program to which problem children could be referred. This was handled very much like a medical case conference with the same commitment to confidentiality, and the same analytical approach to the kinds of problems that children had, and teachers had for that matter.

I will just describe one of the first cases we had to give you a flavor of the way we operated. We had a ten-year old, in the second or third year of our program, who had never made it before in school. Always before, after about three weeks or so, he would do something serious, be suspended and put on homebound, and have a teacher come by maybe once or twice a week. That was the extent of his education. Well, after about four weeks he smashed out the front window, which ordinarily would be enough to get him expelled.

He was put on what we euphemistically call "therapeutic suspension." Today we don't suspend any children. We haven't suspended a child in eight years. It is all in-school suspension, or temporarily held out of the classroom as we work out a plan. In this case we had a conference with the youngster's father. The mother was depressed. The father had a serious alcohol problem. They were divorcing. We could only get the father in, but we had a conference and we analyzed the problem. The youngster was hyperactive. He had a learning problem. In addition, the divorce was going on and he longed for his father who was out of the household at that time. He was impulsive. What we did was develop a program that recognized what was going on with him.

So, what we did was to have him work his way back into the school. For the first hour he would go with the principal, who was a male, and do everything that the principal was doing. He would help the principal in whatever he was doing. He had to tell us when he was able to take the next step. When he felt that he could handle that and felt he was ready for something else, we then had him work with the helping teacher for an hour to work on his learning problem. When he was able to do more, we then had him in the classroom for half an hour, and there are a number of interactions between he and his teacher that we helped the teacher with. Then he worked with the helping teacher to his teacher's classroom for half an hour. Then he worked with his teacher directly, and finally he said, "I can make it." And he did. He made it the rest of the year. He moved away and continued to make it in school.

That, then, brought in other teachers. The successful management of that youngster's problem caused other teachers to begin to take a look at this pupil personnel service that many had been suspicious of before, and we began to work out management plans for all youngsters. We brought the complaining teacher in, the youngsters, the parents, often the principal, and often the social worker. We thought that would overwhelm youngsters at first, and we were watching to see. But what we realized was the youngsters were very pleased that all of these important people, all of these authority figures in this huge confusing social system of 350 people, are concerned about "little ole me." And they were delighted about that. We had very successful management programs for children and problems began to decline.

Now, we didn't always focus on the child as we looked at the problem. We often focused on the system. I'd like to tell another story.

We had a youngster who, on a Friday, was in rural North Carolina in a warm, tightknit social community like the one I described earlier, who was well-supported in that system. And over the weekend, an aunt who had been visiting from New Haven, and wanted that youngster to get a "better education" up North, brought him up. Now, this youngster was in a strange town, and with a strange relative, actually. And on the way to work Monday morning, she dropped him off at school and he met a principal he'd never seen before. Then he was taken into a classroom where the teacher, who had just had three transfers the week before, managed to convey -- without saying a word but through her facial expression -- "This is all I need." The youngster took one look at the classroom of strange kids, kicked the teacher in the leg and ran out.

We thought that was a relatively healthy expression, but the teacher didn't think so. So, we had a meeting and we discussed what was going on -- what it meant to be eight years of age, to have all of your support systems removed within a few hours, and to find yourself in a strange situation -- and that what you were looking at was the classic "fight and flight" reaction. Not one recognized it in that particular youngster, and

not one was able to respond to it in that way until it was called to their attention. At that point they were able to figure out to have "Welcome Johnny" signs. Have that youngster explain who he was and where he was from, what he was doing here, something about his background. Have a youngster who was competent in making it in the classroom become responsible for helping him make it in the classroom, and a whole variety of things they came up with to help that youngster make it in. That's a major problem in urban communities, that transfers are very frequent.

Later on, once the whole climate of the school began to change, we had a youngster come in. Someone stepped on his toe in an exercise and he felt that he had to fight, and he was ready to go. Another youngster said, "Hey man, we don't do that in this school." So, he looked around and he wasn't so sure. And sure enough, the reaction and expression on the face of the teacher and other children said, "We don't do that in this school." Gradually you could see him drop his dukes, and he didn't have to fight his way into the system. The climate had changed in the school and made it possible for smooth transitions to take place. That was the cause of the reduction of many of the problems in our program.

As these sessions of working programs out for children became successful, many teachers who weren't there presenting problems began to drop in just to get some information about ways of dealing with children. They began to share talking about other children from the same family, sharing what they knew about the family, and sharing how they had handled similar problems, and so on. Finally, we made it a seminar, and that became an official way of working and translating information in that particular school. Also we looked at general problems in the schools, and would work out one by one the kinds of problems that we faced. We tried to look at the dynamics and work out some particular solution.

What began to happen was that the climate of the system began to change very greatly. Even in the past, in the beginning, we had funds for extra time after school to work on problems. But the teachers would come in during that hectic period, and they were so tired, so overwhelmed, so frustrated, and so angry, that they really couldn't get into it. They really couldn't participate. So, all of that money from Title I and Ford was going down the drain because they were overwhelmed by the system. Then that began to change, and there were decreased interactional problems. There was much more time and much more energy available than at the beginning of the study, to think about what was going on, and to try out various experiments and programs to develop the teaching and curriculum programs. We had a whole series of things happen, having experienced teacher leaders come in to help the teachers develop their math skills, and their reading skills, and various specialists come in and handle various programs.

4. SOCIAL SKILLS CURRICULUM

Finally, we moved to what we call a social skills curriculum for our inner city children, which was sponsored by the National Institutes of Mental Health, Minority Centers Program.

This grew out of an incident. The school is the polling place in that neighborhood, and one day a teacher who hugs her kids, was hugging this kid in the front while the people were voting, and she was complaining because that interfered with her efforts with her children. And, it occurred to me that one of the things I remembered about my childhood to this day, was the time my mother was working at the polling place. I went by, and she took me into the polling place, into the polling booth, closed the door, and I actually pulled the level myself, which, in fact, was illegal. But it had a tremendous impression on me, and I realize that it helped me identify with the larger social system.

What I realize has not happened in many low income children, is that they have not identified with the larger social system, and that their education has less meaning because it has less direction. They are less in process towards certain kinds of goals and certain kinds of activities in the larger society. We stopped and thought a lot about what we had been doing, and we realized that one of the reasons the school had improved is that we had been teaching children social skills, the skills of negotiation, working problems out, and so on.

So, we developed a very systematic program of teaching the social skills that they would need as adults, many of the skills that many middle-income children receive simply by growing up with their parents, by osmosis. We developed a program which would address all of the areas of life where they would be required to have certain kinds of social skills. We developed units such as a Banking in Business unit, a Health and Nutrition unit, a Spiritual or Leisure Time unit, and a Government unit. They continued to teach basics, but during the free and elective time these units were conducted. We worked to integrate the teaching of the art, the academic and social skills, and really all of the program elements in our particular school.

Just to give you an idea how this worked, there was a mayorality contest going on when we initiated the first unit. So, the youngsters wrote letters inviting the candidates to come to the school and give a speech, and they wrote thank you notes when they finished. That was part of the language arts lesson. These parents who had raised money through their various activities in support of the school program rented a bus, and with the teachers, went around the city and examined conditions in the city. They discussed who was responsible for these conditions, and who should be taking care of these conditions. And they came back and discussed it some more, and that was a government lesson. They were taught how to serve as host and hostesses when the people came out. They also put on a performance for the candidates so

that it was an arts-academic-and-social-skills learning experience. Now, the man who won happened to be very good with children and very supportive of our program from that point on, and that also helped a great deal.

But it was the integration of the arts and academics and social skills that we think was terribly important, and having a Social Skill Program gave meaning to learning abstract basic skills in the classroom. The writing lesson had meaning because the best letter was used, to send to the mayor. So, learning to write well was important. Learning to write and spell well was important, and so on. We did a number of things and we were able to come up with a number of innovations. We were always thinking about what is it that low income children are missing, how are they underdeveloped, and what kinds of skills don't they have?

We developed a discovery room, eventually, for children who were turned off, because many of the children who were growing up in families under stress had received arbitrary kinds of reactions, were uncertain and afraid to take chances in the classroom, had been through serious traumas, had problems that they didn't quite understand, and often simply did not know how to make it in school. We had a discovery room teacher who used a method that was very much like play therapy, but did not go into interpretation. They concentrated more on helping youngsters how to make it in the system, learn that it was okay to spill your water because you could wipe it up, learn that it was okay to do a whole variety of things, and at the same time gave some kinds of skills that you needed. Many of these youngsters went back to their classroom and were able to do well, and at least were not serious social problems.

Also, at the end of one year, a youngster who had been turned off throughout the entire year, had not spoken to the teacher until toward the end of the year, finally smiled at the teacher. The teacher came in the teacher's room, and she was just devastated. She said, "If I had only had her another year." That occurred to us: Why not? And what we thought about was the fact that many youngsters from low income communities have much turnover in their lives, and many people that they can't trust, and have a long time establishing trust.

So, we developed a program in which the teacher stayed with the children for two years. We discovered that many of the children who didn't make great progress in the first year, then jumped and actually caught up in the second year. There was no reason to hold children back, then, because many were catching up in the second year. The continuity of the relationship was terribly important for these youngsters, because even for youngsters who are developing well, it's somewhat disruptive to get attached to someone. Many teachers will tell you that just as things are working smoothly, it's time to leave. It is even more troublesome in communities where there are difficult relationships.

So, we developed this program and many teachers feel that it contributed a great deal to improving the performance in the school. We've tried the program now in another elementary school and a middle school. We're beginning to see the same trends develop, although the achievement is not statistically significant at this point, but we are looking at the same kind of trends that developed in our first school.

EVALUATION

Now, let me get to evaluation, needs, and plans, and something about replication and dissemination.

We did not go in with a fixed research plan. The idea was that the research would grow out of practice. I want to underscore and underline and star that; because I think that the way we do research in education, and the way we do research in many social areas, is inappropriate in that you fix the research plan on the system, and you force the system to try to respond to your research plan, when that's not the way the system is moving. Systems are dynamic. They are changing.

One of the things that made me think about that most when I was at the National Institute of Mental Health, was when a research plan was set up to look at three cities that had had riots, and three cities that had not had riots. Before they could get that research plan off the ground, the three cities that had not had riots, had riots. There is something wrong with that approach.

So, what we did, in the first year of the program was simply to keep a diary of what was going on as a feedback that we could study. We had feedback sessions with everybody in the program. That is where we came to realize how difficult it is for low-income parents to interact with professionals.

We had a woman in the program that all of us admired a great deal. She was bright. Her children were well cared for. She worked well in the school. She was a leader, and she stood up and said, "You know, I'm glad this is a program where everybody respects the parents. When I first came to this program, I couldn't imagine that there was anything that I had to say that would be helpful to professionals." We were just stunned that this lady, who had everything going for her, felt that way. Then what was going on with other parents who were less well educated, and had much less going for them? So, that was something that came out of the early feedback.

We had questionnaires. We had outside evaluators, and we did do some hypothesis testing on a certain limited basis. We also had the achievement tests that we've had over the years.

Now the findings I've reported; but one of the findings, one of the notions that I have as a result of our experience, is that there is no test tube knowledge "over there somewhere." There is no great finding that somebody is going to make in a laboratory somewhere that is going to make a difference. There is no textbook. There is no machine. There is nothing

that is going to make a difference in Classroom A, B, or C, or School A, B, or C. School improvement has to be hammered out on the spot in a particular school by the people who are involved in the schooling process, and we are fooling ourselves if we think that anything else is going to work. Most of the people can't even use the information that is being put out in papers and pamphlets and all kinds of things. It has to be hammered out at that level of operation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. PRESERVICE TRAINING

In terms of needs, I believe that we need preservice training in which teachers and administrators develop: intrapersonal skills, the capacity to handle their own feelings and attitudes; interpersonal skills, the capacity to relate well with other people, children, parents who are different from themselves, administrators, community people, and so on; and environment manipulation or change or management skills, how to work to change the climate in a particular school. The teachers and administrators need to learn that in schools of education, and not on the front line.

I believe there is some kind of screening process necessary to pick up those people who simply can't learn such skills. Education is the only field I know of that really doesn't have a systematic screening process, and it should. It is one of the fields that really should have one.

In addition to the intra/inter-personal/environmental skills, there is also a need for general education, and specific teaching methods. But these intra/inter-personal skills are very, very important, and what is now not being taught, and developed in most places.

The problems in schools are largely interactional problems, and if you could solve those problems, the children would learn. The teachers need to be able to work and support school management, and administrators need to be able to support educational development or curriculum development. All need child development and mental health knowledge, and curriculum development knowledge, how to modify or change a curriculum that is made for Scarsdale to make it work in an inner city school. They need to know that when a kid has his or her support systems removed, that he might kick the teacher and not be a bad kid. These skills and this knowledge should be taught in preservice training.

Now, the fact is that it is not taught in most places; that there aren't going to be that many jobs for new teachers; and that we have lots of teachers and administrators already in schools who haven't had this kind of training. This means that we have to do something about inservice training.

2. INSERVICE TRAINING

I believe that inservice training ought to be school-based, School A, B, and C, much more than system-based where there is general information that may or may not fit the needs of School A, and much more than having "experts" come in to give inspirational messages about the last thing that we learned in London about schooling. We need school-based inservice programs that deal with the skills that teachers need in their particular schools to carry out programs that they are trying to carry out in their particular school.

The existing personnel must be counted on to carry out these programs, but what they need to enable them to do so is some input or training about child development, and the application of child development and know-how skills at the local level.

REPLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

In terms of replication and dissemination, my feeling is that books, films, and all those other things are okay, but that's not really where it's at. It's people. And the answer to a problem in school is a group of people getting together and identifying that problem, mobilizing the school and its resources, planning, implementing, evaluating, and modifying the program to meet the needs of that particular school and those particular children, and the adults in that system as well.

One of the things that we are trying to do at this point is to move back from delivering direct service, but to continue to work in the New Haven school systems. We have identified a key person in the system, in this case it happens to be a principal. We think this is an approach for disseminating the ideas and the approaches that we've used in schools. We're going to work with that person, and we're developing a center that we call the Center for the Application of Research on Education.

This key person, and also a social science person -- because those two groups are often trying to work together in schools -- are going to work together with us for a year to develop a program in which we try to transfer the skills to help the educators develop some behavioral and social science skills, and to have the social science type person develop more knowledge about education. This person is to be a change agent in schools that he/she will go back to.

There will be three elements of the training. First they will be involved in the research project, and learn something about research methodology, and how to use research in school. One of the problems is that we have developed a great amount of research, and then we send it to people who have not been taught the basics of research, the limitations of research findings, and so on. So, we want to pass on some of the knowledge about how you do research, some of the limitations, and some of the problems in utilizing research findings.

Second, we are going to have seminars in which we pass on information about child development, applied mental health practices, and curriculum development.

And, third, we are going to have a practicum. I think this is terribly important. We don't want people sitting back at the universities in a comfortable position, and forgetting what they are there for. The practicum will involve our two trainees working in the schools with the group of principals, helping those principals develop their own school programs.

People will be accepted in our program only if they are part of a plan for change within their own system, and this will have to come from the superintendent.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize then, it is our feeling that the children are able, the parents are able, the school is able, and the school staff is able, and that all desire to be successful, but that the problem is an interactional problem. We have to develop ways to address the interactional problem at the local level, which will bring about change and improve the climate, which will enable teachers, administrators, parents, and children to all pay attention to the curriculum. And when that is accomplished, we feel that children will learn.